



DURHAM
Lord Durham's Speech on the
Second Reading of the Reform
Bill

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ON THE

SECOND READING

OF

THE REFORM BILL.



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LORD DURHAM'S

SPEECH

ON

THE SECOND READING

OF THE

REFORM BILL,

IN THE

HOUSE OF LORDS, FRIDAY, 13th APRIL, 1832.

LONDON :

JAMES RIDGWAY, 169, PICCADILLY.

MDCCCXXXII.

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HOUSE OF LORDS,

FRIDAY, APRIL 13, 1832.

MY LORDS,

NOR having had an opportunity, either of declaring my sentiments, or even giving a personal vote on this most important Question, when it was before the House last, I naturally feel anxious to take advantage of the present moment, and trespass on your attention for a short space of time. I am the more desirous of doing so now, because, from the severe and painful indisposition under which I have lately laboured, and from which I am in fact still suffering, I fear that if I delay addressing your Lordships till a later period of this night's debate, I shall not have strength sufficient to enable me to avail myself of the indulgence of the House.

I have listened with the greatest attention to the long, and may I be permitted to add, desultory speech of the Noble and Learned Lord (Wynford) who has just sat down ; and I can assure him, that

if any interruption came, during a part of that speech, from this side of the House, it was not with the view of impeding the course of the Noble Lord's arguments, but merely for the purpose of setting him right as to the grounds on which those arguments were founded. As for the speech of the Noble and Learned Lord, it has embraced many topics and related to many subjects : but of these, some are entirely unconnected with the question itself, and others with its present stage. In one portion, he alluded to the Household of their Majesties ; in another, to the inconsistency of the Reverend Bench ; in a third, to the state of the Irish Church ; and in a fourth, to the state of the Manufactures of India. The Noble and Learned Lord also entered into a long examination of the details of the Bill, into which I cannot follow him, because the principle of the Measure is alone under discussion at the present moment. Of this, indeed, the Noble and Learned Lord seemed to be fully aware himself, when he apologized for detaining your Lordships so long in discussing the Clauses of the Bill, on the ground that, as we were not likely to go into a Committee, he should never have an opportunity of examining them. Now, as I feel certain that this Bill will go into a Committee, I must decline following a course so inconsistent with the rules and regulations of the House.

My Lords, I must say, however, that the close and laborious attention which I paid to the Noble and Learned Lord's speech, has been in some degree repaid by the pleasure of finding that he, at least, has not adopted that tone of party rancour and personal animosity towards His Majesty's Ministers, which has, in so marked a manner distinguished the debates of the two last nights. Very different, indeed, was the tone and temper of his speech from that which proceeded from the Reverend Bench on the last night. Of that exhibition on the part of a Reverend Bishop (Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter), I shall only say that, if coarse and virulent invective—malignant and false insinuations—the grossest perversion of historical facts—decked out with all the choicest flowers of his well-known pamphleteering slang—

The EARL OF WINCHILSEA rose to order, and moved that the words "*false insinuations*," and "*pamphleteering slang*," should be taken down. After some observations from Earl Grey, Lord Holland, and the Duke of Buckingham, LORD DURHAM continued as follows :—

My Lords, I was interrupted by the Noble Earl in the course of a sentence I was addressing to your Lordships, and it now seems to be his intention that the words which I uttered should be taken down. I have not the slightest objection to that

course being adopted—on the contrary—and I now state to your Lordships the reasons which induced me to use those words. I shall not stop to inquire whether the words “pamphleteering” “slang” were the most elegant which I could have used. They do not perhaps suit the Noble Earl’s taste; but they are the only words which I consider can correctly describe the speech of the Reverend Bishop (Phillpotts). Now, as to the words “*malignant and false insinuations*.” The Noble Duke (Buckingham), who wishes me to retract them, must, I am sure, well recollect that that Reverend Bishop (Phillpotts), in the course of his harangue, insinuated that some of His Majesty’s Ministers were unbecomingly connected with the Press. From the terms in which that insinuation was couched, I could have no doubt that he alluded to me. It would be gross affectation in me to deny it—the more especially, as I had been previously told, by those who had read those papers, that the same charge had been made against me, by name, in those weekly publications which are so notorious for their scurrility and indecency. When, therefore, I found that charge repeated in this House, in terms which neither I or any man living could misunderstand, I determined to take the earliest opportunity of stating to your Lordships that it was as false as scandalous. I now

repeat that declaration, and pause for the purpose of giving any Noble Lord an opportunity of taking down my words.

LORD DURHAM then resumed his seat for a moment, but as no Noble Lord rose, he proceeded to say—

My Lords,—As it seems no further interruption is to be offered me, I shall dismiss the subject by saying, that I never will shrink from the opportunity of meeting before this House, or my country, any charges or insinuations which may be directed against me, from whatever quarter they may proceed. If I have expressed myself somewhat earnestly and warmly, your Lordships will, I am sure, deem me justified, when you reflect that, to all the tortures of an afflicted mind, have been of late superadded calumnies of the basest description—calculated to wound not only my own feelings, but those of all who are dearest to me :—but I now return to the Question, from which I have been diverted by the interruption of the Noble Earl.

My Lords, we have been charged by a Noble and Gallant Duke (Wellington), and a Noble Earl who sits on the third bench (Mansfield), with having created that excitement in the public mind which led to that general demand for Reform, which is now admitted to prevail by many of those who formerly denied its existence. On

what facts those Noble Lords found their assertion, I cannot comprehend. If there is any one subject which more than another has been discussed, both in and out of Parliament, especially within the last fifty years, it has been that of a Reform in the Representation of the People. From the Revolution, it has been advocated by the most eminent men of which this country can boast. From the year 1783, when the celebrated Yorkshire Petition was presented, it has never been lost sight of by the people; taken up, it is true, with more or less energy, according to the circumstances of the times—but always holding a high place in their estimation, and connected by them with the most vital interests of the country. It was brought under the notice of Parliament by the Duke of Richmond, in 1780;—Mr. Pitt, in 1782, 1783, and 1784;—and subsequently by Mr. Flood, my Noble Relation at the head of the Government, Sir F. Burdett, Mr. Brand, Lord Archibald Hamilton, Lord John Russell, and many others. The Noble and Gallant Duke, therefore, is not supported by facts, when he says, the feeling is one of late growth;—and still less when he says, that it is owing to the examples of the French and Belgian Revolutions of 1830. That it has assumed a much more formidable appearance within these last four or five years is

true ; but not owing to the causes alleged by the Noble and Gallant Duke. In my opinion, it has been owing, in a great measure, to the repeated refusals of your Lordships to grant representation to the great towns of Leeds, Manchester, and Birmingham, when the fitting opportunities were afforded you ;—it has also arisen from the exposures which took place in the Parliamentary inquiries relative to Grampound, Penryn, and East Retford, laying bare scenes of the grossest political profligacy and corruption ;—but above all, my Lords, it has been in consequence of the great mass of the middle classes having at length identified themselves with this Question. To this part of the subject I particularly wish to call your Lordships' attention, not only because I think its full consideration involves one of the great and leading principles of the Bill—I mean the emancipation of those classes,—but because it will account, in the only satisfactory mode, for the intensity of feeling with which this Measure has been received ; and will demonstrate the improbability of the country being satisfied with any less degree of Reform than that which is afforded them by this Bill.

Your Lordships are, no doubt, too well read in the history of your country not to be aware, that, up to the Revolution of 1688, the object of each successive struggle was to prevent the Sovereign

from obtaining despotic power. At that period the Crown was defeated, and has ever since been dependent on, and at the mercy of, two parties of the higher orders—between whom the contest for political power has been bitter and incessant—whilst the people were well or ill governed, according to the principles of the party which was predominant. For a long time, the people acquiesced in the supremacy of the higher orders, and their exclusive possession of political privileges. Conscious of their own incompetency, from want of education, to enjoy those privileges, they felt no jealousy, and offered no opposition to the monopoly vested in their superiors. But, my Lords, a great change has taken place within the last fifty years in the state of society. The two extremes have been gradually meeting—the one standing still, whilst the other has been gradually improving. It cannot be concealed, that the middle classes have increased, of late, in skill, talent, political intelligence, and wealth, to such an extent, that they are, and feel that they are, competent to the performance of higher duties. They thus, naturally enough, feel ambitious to be no longer excluded from their fair share of political power: and the result of their continued exclusion must be a political convulsion—and necessarily a destructive one—for the unnatural compression of great power by insufficient means,

always ends not only in the annihilation of the feeble bonds which restrain it, but in the destruction of all that is within the range of its explosion.

That the middle classes have a right to indulge in these feelings, no accurate observer of the state of society can deny. The Noble Duke opposite, the proprietor of St. Mawes, (Buckingham) has thought proper to describe them as paupers—as beggars. So far from this being the fact, their wealth more than doubles, nearly trebles that of the higher orders*. As for their intelligence—look at all the great towns of the Empire—this Metropolis, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Liverpool, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and many others—and by whom will you find the scientific institutions, the literary societies, the charities—in short, all associations tending to the advancement of arts, literature, and of science, and to the amelioration of the human kind—by whom will you find them supported?—by whose example and whose purse maintained? By the Middle Classes.

The gentry, living apart in the country, enjoy the luxuries and amusements peculiar to their class, but mix neither in the pursuits or

* In 1814, Colquhoun estimated the income of the productive classes at £.292,555,147—that of the unproductive, at £.137,966,225.

relaxations of their neighbours in the towns. Whenever they are brought together in public meetings, on political occasions, their superiority in learning or intellect is no longer manifest—the reverse is the fact; and I can assure the Noble Baron (Ellenborough), that whether he is right or wrong in the opinion he entertains, with regard to the inferiority of intellect displayed by the newly-returned Members, if he were to attend any of the meetings of the middle classes, and enter into a discussion with them on political or scientific subjects, he would have no reason to plume himself on his fancied superiority. This being the case then, the question is naturally asked, is that a fit and proper state of the Constitution, which excludes from the enjoyment of political power and privileges a large body of men, possessed of talents, skill, and wealth, merely because they do not happen to be included in a particular class, endowed with privileges bestowed upon them in different times, and different circumstances? I contend, therefore, my Lords, that these feelings alone would be sufficient to induce the people to desire that the advantages, as well as the burthens, of the Constitution should be extended to them. But were there no other reasons? Did the working of the Constitution, in its present exclusive state, produce no other mischievous effects than their exclusion? Did those who virtually represented them—as the

Noble and Learned Lord (Wynford) says—did they perform the duties of their trust advantageously to the country? The answer, my Lords, which the people give to these questions is, and always has been, in the negative. I can accumulate proofs upon proofs of the correctness of this assertion—a few will suffice. It appears, that when this corrupt Parliamentary system first came into operation—I mean shortly after the Revolution—the National Debt amounted to £.16,000,000; at the end of the last war, in 1814, it had risen very nearly to £.800,000,000. The National Expenditure had increased, during that time, from £.5,600,000 to more than £.94,000,000. The Poor Rates from £.1,000,000 to £.7,000,000. In one reign alone, that of George III., £.27,000,000 were lavished in subsidies to all the great powers of the continent*. In the same

	£.
* Austria . . .	7,070,000
Prussia . . .	1,683,000
Russia . . .	1,952,000
Sicily . . .	2,300,000
Sweden . . .	2,706,673
Spain . . .	2,637,831
Ditto . . .	673,441
Portugal . . .	8,380,000

£.27,402,945

exclusive of £.4,000,000, granted to French, Corsican, and Toulouse emigrants—French clergy—St. Domingo, Russian, Portuguese sufferers, &c. &c.

period, the naval and military expenditure amounted to £.928,000,000—that is to say, the luxury of indulging in war cost this country a sum little less than ONE THOUSAND MILLIONS. All these proofs of an unlimited and unchecked expenditure, and many others*, which I need not now detail, became known to the people at the conclusion of the war. Great distress followed—much discontent and loud complaints prevailed—and how were they met? by conciliation or concession? No—by every species of repressive and coercive enactment. Measures for preventing the exercise of public meetings and petitioning—for fettering the Press—for suspending the Habeas Corpus Act—for granting Indemnity Bills—were successively proposed to the House of Commons, and immediately adopted by that Assembly. These proceedings seem, if I may judge from their cheers, to be approved of by the Noble Lords opposite;—they

* Sir James Graham subsequently brought before Parliament another instance of the working of the present system,—the sums annually paid to Privy Councillors. He proved, that of these 169 persons, 113 received £.650,164 per annum; of which £.86,103 were for Sinécures,—£.121,650 for Pensions,—and £.442,333 for active services. Of these—30 were Pluralists, receiving £.221,133 per annum;—47 were Peers, receiving £.378,300 per annum;—and 22 were Members of the House of Commons, receiving £.90,849 per annum.

were not grateful to the people, I can assure them—who, seeing their liberties attacked, and their resources squandered, through the instrumentality of a House of Commons, theoretically the guardian of both, naturally directed their attention to the mode in which that House was chosen, which neither represented their feelings or protected their interests. The picture which was then presented to them was no less startling and disgusting than that of the state of their finances, to which I have just alluded. They found one portion nominated by Peers—a second by Commoners—a third by trafficking attornies, selling seats to the highest bidder—a fourth owing its return to the most unblushing bribery and corruption ;—in one part of the Empire a Park, with no population at all, or at least of the smallest kind, returning two Members,—in another, a large and important town, with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, with no representation at all—and even that small part of the House still dependent on the public voice, so fettered and circumscribed by the immense expenditure required, as to be virtually placed in the hands of a very small class. My Lords, all this led to that state of things which has been so prophetically and so accurately described by a celebrated writer, whose name is so familiar to Noble Lords opposite, and whose opinions are gene-

rally so pleasing to them, that I make no apology for substituting his glowing words for my feeble expressions. Mr. Burke says :—

“ An addressing House of Commons, and a petitioning Nation—a House of Commons full of confidence, when the Nation is plunged in despair—in the utmost harmony with Ministers, whom the People regard with the utmost abhorrence—who vote thanks, when the public opinion calls upon them for impeachments—who are eager to grant, when the general voice demands account—who, in all disputes between the People and the Administration, presume against the People—who punish their disorders, but refuse even to inquire into the provocations to them ;—this is an unnatural, a monstrous state of things in this Constitution.

“ Such an assembly may be a great, wise, awful Senate—but it is not, to any popular purpose, a House of Commons.”

My Lords, I think that I have now stated sufficient reasons to account for the general prevalence of that desire for Reform which now exists, and to show that it did not owe its origin, either to our instigation, or to the French and Belgian Revolutions, as stated by the Noble and Gallant Duke opposite (Wellington) ;—at all events, of this I am quite confident—that to whatever causes it is to be

ascribed, it can never be allayed or removed by any other mode than that of a full and generous compliance with the wishes of the People. Here, however, I am met by the Noble Lords opposite, who talk so loudly of the dangers of concession, and the safety of resistance—and by the Reverend Bishop (Phillpotts), who preaches to us the necessity of leaving the consequences to God. My Lords, I say nothing of the impropriety of those constant appeals to that sacred name, in this place—especially from such a quarter—but I ask, is history to be for ever a sealed book to those Noble Lords? Are its pages to be for ever perverted by the Reverend Bishop (Phillpotts)? Do they not teem with instances of the folly and inutility of resistance to the determined wishes of the People, intent on the acquirement or restoration of their rights? When the consequences have been left to Providence, has that resistance ever produced any thing but a postponement of those claims, always to be renewed with increased vigour, and ultimately attended with complete success? My Lords, I assert that the Revolution of 1641, the French Revolution of 1785, and the separation of the North American Colonies—as was truly observed by the Noble Baron on the cross benches (Wharncliffe), might all have been averted by timely and wise concession. Can any man, with the slightest

knowledge of our history, attempt to persuade me, that if Charles I., after conceding the Petition of Rights, had kept his faith with his people, he would not have saved his crown and his life? The Noble Duke (Buckingham), who alluded on the last night to the fate of this king, argued on what occurred at a subsequent time, when all concessions were rendered useless by Charles's repeated acts of treachery—and his unconstitutional and illegal violations of the rights and liberties of his subjects. I refer to the first stage of these unhappy proceedings, when, by wise and honest measures, the monarchy might have been strengthened and consolidated. Again, with reference to the French Revolution, I say, that if Louis XVI. had adopted the advice given him by his Ministers, the people would have been satisfied—the ancient institutions of the country ameliorated—the altar, the throne, and the aristocracy, preserved from the horrible fate which afterwards befel them. Twice had Louis XVI. opportunities—first, under Turgot's ministry; secondly, under Necker's,—of conciliating the country, and averting that fatal catastrophe, by limited concessions. The nobility resisted—and the Revolution followed. The Noble Baron (Wharncliffe) has so ably detailed you the impolicy of our resistance to the claims of the North American Colonies, that I need only add to

his powerful argument my own conviction, that if, after the Repeal of the Stamp Act, England had not destroyed all the benefit of that concession, by the Declaratory Act, and the re-imposition of the Tea Duties, North America would at this hour have been a portion of the British empire. My Lords, I repeat, therefore, fortified by these examples, that when the consequences have been left to Providence, according to the suggestion of the Reverend Bishop (Phillpotts), the course of events has always been uniform—in the first instance, bigotted resistance to the claims of the people—in the second, bloody and protracted struggles; and finally, but invariably, unlimited, disgraceful, but then useless concession.

But, my Lords, have those of you who talk of resistance, calculated the comparative amount of forces which are arranged on each side? On the one hand, are arrayed the Crown, the House of Commons, and the People—on the other, not Two Hundred Peers—if a majority, at least a bare one of this House. Now, my Lords, supposing that you reject this Bill a second time—and supposing that the People acquiesce quietly in your decision, and that their feelings of disappointment do not break out in open tumult and violence; will there be no punishment to you in the utter separation, which must take place, between you and your fellow-countrymen? In the sentence of excommu-

nication which they will pass upon you—Are you prepared to live in solitude in the midst of multitudes—your mansions fortified with cannon, (as was lately that of the Noble Duke Newcastle)—and protected by troops of faithful, perhaps, but if the hour of danger came, useless retainers? Surely there must be something in this state of things most revolting to the habits and feelings of a British Peer—and yet these are the most favourable circumstances which can follow the second rejection of this Bill. I see before me many Noble Lords, who pride themselves on the cordiality of their intercourse with all around them, in the country, both rich and poor—whose presence there is generally welcomed by the congratulations of their neighbours, of all ranks—will those Noble Lords receive with equal complacency the greetings they will have to encounter after having destroyed the long cherished hopes of their fellow countrymen? No—my Lords, I fear the change between confidence and distrust, affection and hatred, will be so great, that the satisfaction of having preserved Nomination Boroughs for a time—and for a time only—will but ill console them for the annoyances and expressions of dislike and aversion which will be heaped on them on all sides. I contend, therefore, that resistance must produce the very worst consequences, tending to destroy that harmony

and good-will among all classes of society, which are so essential in every well-governed state—and especially in this country, where all should be

Not equal,—yet free,
Equally free—for orders and degrees
Jar not with Liberty, but well consist.

My Lords, it was, under this conviction, and believing as I did, and still do, that the claims of the people of this country were not to be trifled or tampered with by any Ministers—it was under this persuasion, that I, for one, and I believe all my colleagues, came to the consideration of this Measure—and were anxious to frame such a Bill, as, by its large and comprehensive provisions, might not only give general satisfaction, but at the same time set this Question finally at rest. Into a detailed examination of those provisions, this, as I have already said, is not the fit opportunity for entering. They have, moreover, together with the alterations which have taken place, been so ably and fully detailed by my Noble Relation, who moved the Second Reading of this Bill, that I need not say more, than that its leading principles are, as in the former Bill—the disfranchisement of all Nomination Boroughs—the purification of the lesser Boroughs—the enfranchisement of the great and populous towns—the

emancipation of the middle classes—and the diminution of the expense of elections.

There is, however, one portion of the details to which a Noble Marquess (Londonderry) alluded on a former night, with which I am personally connected, and therefore your Lordships must permit me shortly to refer to them. The Noble Marquess was pleased to accuse me, for whom he professed private respect and esteem, of having been a party to a gross job. How the Noble Lord can entertain any respect or esteem for a person whom he supposes to have been guilty of such improper conduct, I certainly am at a loss to conceive. I can assure him, and your Lordships, that I never could respect myself, if I felt for a moment that I had been guilty of, or accessory to, any such proceeding. My Lords, I will not retaliate—I will not make use of any such harsh expressions, in return, towards the Noble Marquess, with whom formerly I lived on terms of personal friendship; but I must beg leave to tell him, that when the provisions of this Bill are closely and fairly investigated, it will be found that the privileges which are extended to the county of Durham, can be justified to their fullest extent, on those principles of wealth and population which have been taken as the tests for enfranchisement in this Bill;—nay, more, I pledge

myself to prove, that they do not even border on the limits, within which other towns and counties have derived the benefit of representation—and that if you were to strike them out, you would also have to disfranchise many others now included, but inferior to them in population and wealth. I solemnly disclaim any wish or intention to procure for myself any personal advantage or influence whatever. I should be ashamed of myself if I had entertained any such desire—and if I had—the attempt would have been futile, for the constituency to be created is so numerous, intelligent, and independent, as to be above all influence, either of mine or any other person.

Here I shall take the opportunity of briefly noticing the statement made the other night by the Noble and Gallant Duke (Wellington), with respect to Christchurch and Tavistock. My Lords, the observations made by the Noble Duke, would lead to the impression, that Tavistock had received an unfair preference. Such, perhaps, was not the object of the Noble Duke, when he made those remarks; but it undoubtedly was that of the person from whom he received the statement. That calculation, unexplained, would lead your Lordships to imagine that the return of Population, Assessed Taxes, and Houses, quoted by the Noble Duke, related to the two Boroughs, at the time when the question of their disfranchisement

had to be determined. That is not the fact—those returns related to the enlarged boundaries made subsequently by the Commissioners. At the time of disfranchisement, Tavistock had

Population.	Houses.	Assessed Taxes.	£.10 Houses.
4,388	626	£.1,124 15 9	269

Christchurch had

Population.	Houses.	Assessed Taxes.	£.10 Houses.
2,262	516	£.733 12 3	191

The comparison, therefore, of the enlarged Borough of Tavistock, with the enlarged Borough of Christchurch, has nothing to do with the question of disfranchisement, which could not have been decided in any other way without violating every principle of fairness and justice.

Before I conclude, my Lords, I must notice an objection to this Bill, made by the Noble and Learned Lord (Wynford), who preceded me this night. He says, that the expense of contested Elections will be greatly increased by this Bill, because all who know any thing of the nature of that expense, must be aware that it chiefly arises from the charges made on account of Agents and Poll Clerks ; and therefore, as the polling places are greatly multiplied, a greater expenditure will be proportionably required. My Lords, I differ with the Noble and Learned Lord, entirely. I have

had the honour—and certainly a very expensive one—to stand a severe contest for the Representation of the County of Durham. It cost me, as I once told your Lordships before, no less a sum than £.30,000,—and I believe, a Noble Friend behind me, a Noble Marquess (Cleveland), could give your Lordships some further information, as to the sums of money lavished at that Election, it having cost him also, I fear, rather more than the sum I have mentioned. I have, therefore, had some experience on this point—and I can assure the Noble and Learned Lord that the main and great expense arises in bringing up Voters from a distance, and in paying for their legal subsistence at the county town, until they have polled. During the whole time that the election lasted, the legal entertainment of the voters cost me £.1000 a day. I therefore must contend that, by appointing polling places in different parts of the county, we shall take away the necessity for incurring these heavy charges for travelling and subsistence, and therefore materially, if not entirely, diminish the great expenditure now required. My Lords, there are many other topics to which the Noble and Learned Lord has alluded, but which cannot, I repeat, be properly debated except in the Committee. I must therefore postpone any notice of them until that period—with this declaration merely—that there

are no persons more anxious than His Majesty's Ministers that the provisions of the Bill should undergo the severest scrutiny—or more desirous to remove any well-grounded objections which may be fairly urged against them.

For all these reasons, My Lords, which I have ventured to submit to your consideration, I implore you to consent to the Second Reading of a Bill—the object of which is—to give security to the Throne—contentment to the People—and permanence to all the best Institutions of the Country,—and shall now conclude, by saying, in the words of that illustrious statesman, whose principles I venerate, and whose example I have endeavoured to follow, although at a humble distance, throughout the whole course of my political life,—I mean Mr. Fox,—“ We risk our all upon the excellence of
 “ this Bill. We risk upon it whatever is most
 “ dear to us, whatever men most value—the cha-
 “ racter of integrity, of honour, of present repu-
 “ tation and future fame—these and whatever else
 “ is precious to us, we stake on the constitutional
 “ safety—the enlarged policy—the equity—and
 “ wisdom of this measure.”

FINIS.

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